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Reading the Waters

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Vol. 2, No. 1

January 1990

Fishing Access Sites

Public access to some waters in the state has long been an issue. In the 1940s and 1950s, department acquisition of game ranges — which sometimes included access to waters — was about the only access-related activity undertaken by the Department. In 1964, the Department reorganized. A newly formed Recreation and Lands Division was charged with acquiring, developing, and maintaining fishing access sites (FAS). A few years later, the State Parks System moved from the Highway Department to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and a Parks and Recreation Division was formed.

In 1977, anglers pushed for expansion of the FAS program and supported a bill earmarking a portion of their license fees for purchase of new access sites. That now includes $5 from the non-resident season license and $1 each from the resident season and non-resident two-day license.

Today there are over 290 designated FAS dispersed around the state. Most are called fishing access sites, but some are identified as fishing access areas, boat camps, greenways, and recreational corridor access sites. Many are small and relatively undeveloped. Others are larger, providing dispersed fishing access as well as camping. In addition, the Department's Parks Division manages 30 state recreation areas, nearly all of which provide access to water, primarily large lakes and reservoirs.

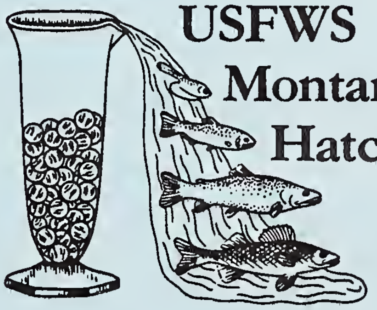
One goal of the fishing access site program is to provide for a four-hour float between sites on larger rivers. Distance can vary depending on the amount and type of use. In general, most major rivers now have an adequate number of points to launch and land boats. Attention is shifting toward providing access to small or medium sized lakes and reservoirs, particularly near population centers and for warmwater fishing. There is also interest in providing for dispersed recreation along some reaches of stream to spread out use by bank anglers.

Unlike the more heavily used state recreation areas, the policy for developing fishing access sites in recent years has been to provide minimal service to keep down costs. Typically, this will include graveling a road and parking area, fencing the boundary, and constructing a boat ramp, if needed. Latrines and trash cans are only provided where use is expected to be high. Camping and picnicking facilities are not normally provided. New federal

(continued on page 2)

PLEASE RETURN

One of the 290 FAS managed by the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks; this one providing camping, as well as boating.



USFWS Montana Fish Hatcheries

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) operates two fish hatcheries and one fish technology center in Montana. At the Creston National Fish Hatchery (NFH), located about 15 miles east of Kalispell, approximately 1.25 million catchable and subcatchable trout are reared. The majority of these fish are planted on Indian reservations in the state. Under an agreement with the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, trout are also raised for planting in reservoirs like Canyon Ferry.

The Creston NFH also operates as a broodstock station, providing about 6.3 million rainbow trout eggs (Eagle Lake strain) annually. Eggs in excess of the hatchery's own needs are shipped to state and federal hatcheries throughout the United States. In 1989, the Creston facility provided eggs to 21 federal and 16 state hatcheries.

The Ennis NFH, located 12 miles southwest of Ennis, functions primarily as a broodstock station producing about

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Whitefishing "Opens Up" the Winter

Has cabin fever got you or someone you know down? Well, we have a cure. Get out and catch some of the most populous — and least popular — fish Montana has to offer. They may not be among the hardest striking fish in Big Sky waters, but they are among the most flavorful to ever simmer in your pan. Whitefish!

Now before you snap: "Aw, c'mon! Those trash fish with the funny mouths?," consider the following:

- Whitefish, as most of you probably already know, are close cousins of trout that inhabit many of the same waters (indeed, they are members of the same family).
- Whitefish take a fly readily and can be caught with many of the same fly fishing techniques as trout.
- Anglers can catch and keep up to a hundred whitefish per day.

The numbers of waters on which whitefishing can take place year round is growing annually.

Many fishermen consider whitefish, either prepared in a smoker, fried, baked or broiled to be even more flavorful than trout.

Howard Johnson, chief of Fisheries Management Bureau for the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena, describes whitefish as "one of the most under utilized sport fishes in Montana," meaning: the fish are there but nobody is out catching them.

With this in mind, and in an effort to increase angling opportunities during our over-extended winters, the state has established extended whitefish seasons on a number of Montana waters — 15 in the Western Fishing District and two in the Central District. These are:

Western District

- Mainstem of the Bitterroot River
- East Fork Bitterroot River
- West Fork Bitterroot River
- Ditches, canals and sloughs of the Bitterroot Valley between U.S. Highway 93 and the East Side Highway from Hamilton to Florence
- Blackfoot River
- Clark Fork River from below the Anaconda Company Settling Pond spillway to the mouth of the Thompson River
- Fisher River
- Mainstem of the Flathead River from the confluence of the North and Middle Forks Flathead to Sportsman's Bridge at Highway 82
- Libby Creek
- Little Blackfoot River
- Middle Fork Flathead River
- North Fork Flathead River
- Rock Creek from its mouth to the mouth of West Fork Rock Creek
- Swan River from Swan Lake to Bigfork Dam
- Thompson River
- Tobacco River

Central District

- Big Hole River, except for that stretch between the Divide Dam and Melrose Bridge
- Shields River

As on those waters that traditionally have been open to angling year round, up to 100 whitefish can be caught and kept on the waters listed above during their extended whitefish seasons.

Because these waters are closed to trout fishing during their extended whitefish seasons, all trout inadvertently caught must be immediately released. To reduce the likelihood of catching a trout during the extended whitefish season, anglers can, by law, bait their hooks only with maggots, a bait that is much more attractive to whitefish than it is to trout.

Spincasters and fly fishermen, however, can use any artificial lure or fly they choose to land whitefish, but they, too, must release all trout caught on waters where the extended whitefish season is in effect.

So, if you're caught in the depths of a sportsman's mid-winter blues, take advantage of Montana's extended whitefish season. Who knows, that fish with the weird little mouth could become a favorite guest at your dinner table.

Access Sites, continued

requirements dictate that the Department begin providing more access opportunities to handicapped users.

The major issue the Department faces in the future concerns how to continue to provide access to waters and balance an increasing number of access sites with the costs of developing and maintaining those sites. There is currently an estimated $2 million backlog of development needed at fishing access sites. This does not include the cost of providing handicapped access which will likely be another $1 million or more.

Even with the minimal level of maintenance and service that is provided at access sites, our Parks Division still must spend about $700,000 each year maintaining these sites, including wages and travel. This far exceeds the amount of money from the earmarked license revenue sources. The earmarked license revenue generates less than $400,000 a year, with 75%, by law, earmarked for acquisition.

Currently the Department is reviewing several options to address these financial concerns. These include the possibility of soliciting local organizations or communities to assume the maintenance of some sites, changing the law to allow us to use a larger percentage of earmarked funds for development and maintenance, and charging fees to those site users who have not purchased a fishing license.

"You can almost feel them biting, can't you?"

Hatchery, continued

30 million eggs each year from six pure strains of rainbow trout. Eggs are produced over a nine-month period and shipped throughout the nation to federal and state fish hatcheries, federal technology centers and fishery research facilities. In 1989, eggs were shipped to 52 federal and 35 state facilities in 26 states.

Approximately 250,000 subcatchable trout, reared at Ennis under an agreement with the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, are planted in Deadman's Basin Reservoir and Browns Lake each year. Excess broodstock, weighing from 5-15 pounds each, are planted in the kids' fishing ponds in Ennis, Virginia City, Bozeman and Three Forks. Excess broodstock not utilized in Montana are sent to the Idaho Fish and Game Department for planting in rivers and reservoirs within Idaho.

The Bozeman Fish Technology Center, located four miles northeast of Bozeman, is one of four technology centers located throughout the nation under the National Fish Hatchery system. The station was designated a research and development center in 1965. Since 1983 very little operational fish production has occurred at the center; fish are now produced only as a part of specific investigations.

The center's program is one of research and development in the areas of fish culture, fish health, fish nutrition and fish management. Considerable time and effort are also spent each year providing technical assistance in the above-mentioned areas to federal, state and private fisheries programs through the United States and Canada. In 1986, the Beulah Fish Technology Center in Wyoming was closed and its function — developing a diet and testing program for salmonids and coolwater species, especially walleye — was transferred to Bozeman.

It is largely through the efforts of the center's staff that a broodstock of the threatened Greenback cutthroat trout from Colorado was developed at the Bozeman Center. Each year since 1980 fingerlings have been taken to Colorado for planting in their native streams. As a result of this successful program, there are currently about 14 natural spawning populations of this threatened species in their native habitat, and they will soon be removed from the "threatened species" list.

Legislative Update
Senate Bill 260

The Idea is Disease Prevention

We make fishery laws to protect our fishery resources. Most often the laws are developed to respond to an existing or potential concern. But quite often our knowledge of potential threats to the resource changes and the protection afforded by the law is not broad enough to cover a newly discovered threat. When that happens, it's time to change the law. Unfortunately, we don't always realize the law is inadequate until it's too late.

Montana's fish disease laws were an example of legislation that was long overdue for revision. The law had been drafted in the early 1970s when a few fish pathogens had been recognized as potential disease threats and the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (along with many other state agencies across the country) realized we should start to regulate transportation of fish to prevent the spread of disease. It was a good idea, and the earlier law was a comprehensive piece of legislation. But most often the law was referred to only with reference to government hatcheries, since importations by private hatcheries were not monitored. We complied with the law, and if a situation wasn't covered by the old law, it was considered legal.

As far as we know, no major diseases were introduced by unregulated fish importations, although several fish pathogens were introduced that could have had a serious impact on our fisheries. The fact is, we were just plain lucky.

Montana's fish health program is based on *prevention* rather than *control.* Once a disease becomes established, it is most likely to stay. The only way to deal with it is to try to control and contain it. In the hatchery, disease means purchasing lots of expensive chemicals and a reduction in the number of waters in which fish can be stocked. In the wild, it means reduced fish populations, increased demands for hatchery fish and possibly the reduction or loss of valuable, irreplaceable native fish stocks. Disease is so widespread in some states that their only option is to live with it at great expense. But in Montana, we still have the option of prevention.

Montana's new disease law was designed to keep our options open, i.e., to allow us to control disease with prevention rather than chemicals. SB 260, passed by the 1989 Montana Legislature, substantially revises Montana fish disease laws and adds several new measures of protection. The old law dealt primarily with importation of salmonids into Montana. The new law enhances our concern about salmonid imports, but also goes several steps further to include provisions for non-salmonids and for control of intrastate movements of diseased fish in addition to importation from out of state.

Some of the biggest changes in Montana's new disease law include the following:

1. All importations of fish or fish eggs into Montana by any government agency or private individual must now be authorized by an import permit available through applications from the Department.

Fish health certifications also are still required for all salmonid fish imports, yet the new law gives FW&P the authority to require certification for non-salmonids when it considers it necessary.

2. The new law gives the Department the authority to deny transfers of diseased fish within Montana.

3. The new law gives the Department the authority to quarantine any facility where specified disease-causing organisms are discovered and to order destruction of infected stock when necessary.

4. Under the new law, non-salmonid fish imports are treated the same as salmonids. Aquarium fish are specifically excluded from the law.

5. Under the new law, anyone who owns or operates a fish culture facility is required to report any suspected disease problems to the Department and is held liable if they do not.

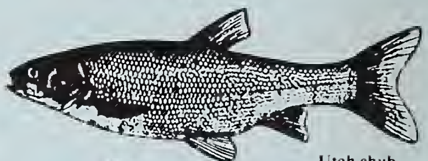
These are the most sweeping changes in Montana's disease laws. The new law is now a comprehensive and effective tool for fish health management and fish disease prevention.

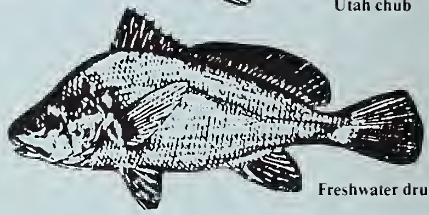
Non-game Fish Records for Montana — 1989

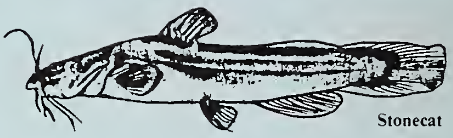
SPECIES	WEIGHT (lbs.)	WEIGHT (ozs.)	ANGLER	DATE	LOCATION
Bigmouth buffalo	32	6	Gary Lundman	1979	Missouri River (Slippery Ann Game Station)
Black bullhead	1	11	Mike Mitchell	1977	Horse Creek (McCone Co.)
Black crappie	3	2	Al Elser	1973	Tongue River Reservoir
*Blue sucker***	*10.52*		*Donna Eppers*	*1989*	*Missouri River (below Fred Robinson Bridge)*
Bluegill	2.64		Brent Fladmo	1983	Peterson's Stock Dam
*Burbot (ling)***	*17*	*8*	*Jeff Iwen*	*1989*	*Missouri River (near Wolf Point)*
Carp	38	8	Don Bagley	1986	Eyraud Lakes
Freshwater drum	20	7	Richard Lee	1987	Fort Peck Reservoir
*Goldeye***	*2.91*		*Vance "Bubba" Kielb*	*1989*	*Irrigation canal west of Malta*
Longnose sucker*	3.27		Ray Quigley	1988	Marias River
Northern squawfish	7.25		Loyal Herreid	1987	Lower Flathead River
Pumpkinseed	0.95		Tim Colver	1985	Milnor Lake
Shorthead redhorse sucker	4.68		Ray Quigley	1985	Marias River near Loma
Shortnose gar	3	1	John Johnson	1977	Fort Peck Dredge Cuts
*Smallmouth buffalo***	*10*	*4*	*Ron Skirvin*	*1989*	*Fort Peck Dredge Cuts*
Stonecat	0.42		Robert Garwood	1985	Milk River at Havre
Utah chub	1.43		Steve Kovatch	1986	Canyon Ferry Reservoir
White bass	1	2	Ludwig Dubbe	1986	Fort Peck Dredge Cuts
White crappie	2	2	Drew Jackson	1978	Tongue River Reservoir
White sucker	5	5 1/3	Fred Perry	1983	Nelson Reservoir
Yellow bullhead	0.72		Wade Fredenberg	1987	Yellowstone River
Yellow perch*	2.37		Vernon Schmid	1988	Ashley Lake

* New Montana records for 1988
** New Montana records for 1989

Pumpkinseed


Utah chub


Freshwater drum


Stonecat

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Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
K.L. Cool, *Director*
Ron Marcoux, *Deputy Director*
Pat Graham, *Associate Director*
Larry Peterman, *Acting Administrator*
Fisheries Division

Calendar of Events January 1990 - March 1990

January 17-18, 1990	Fish and Game Commission Meeting, Helena
January 23-25, 1990	DFWP Fisheries Division Annual Meeting, Whitefish
February 5-7, 1990	Great Plains Fisheries Workers Association Annual Meeting, Casper, Wyoming
February 13, 1990	American Fisheries Society Environmental Ethics Seminar, Lewistown
February 14-16, 1990	American Fisheries Society Annual Meeting, Lewistown
February 23-24, 1990	Fish and Game Commission Meeting, Helena
March 1, 1990	1990 Fishing License required; new fishing regulations available
March 2-3, 1990	Fish and Game Commission Meeting, Helena

Produced by the Helena Fisheries Division of the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

The Annual Fisherman Log newsletter is attached as a supplement to this newsletter.

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